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FM THE SITUATION ROOM TOHAK268

TO RODMAN/LORD FOR DR. KISSINGER

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T O P S E C R E T EYES ONLY WH30645

State Dept. review completed

TOHAK 268

FROM : AMBASSADOR GODLEY, VIENTIANE 715

THIS AFTERNOON, FEBRUARY 19 AT 2:30 P.M., THE "TOUT VIENTIANE" WAS AT THE AIRPORT, SAYING FAREWELL TO THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR, WHO WAS LEAVING LAOS AFTER A FIVE YEAR TOUR HERE. THE LPF WAS REPRESENTED BY SOTH PHETRASY AND SEVERAL UNDERLINGS. WHILE DCM DEAN WAS STANDING NEXT TO THE BISHOP OF LAOS, SOTH CAME UP AND STARTED SOCIAL CONVERSATION WITH THE BISHOP IN WHICH DEAN JOINED. WHEN FRENCH AMBASSADOR HAD DEPARTED AND THE MANY WELL-WISHERS HAD LEFT THE AIRPORT, DEAN FOUND HIMSELF ALONE WITH SOTH, WHO MADE NO MOVE TO AVOID CONVERSATION, WHICH LASTED FOR TWENTY-FIVE MINUTES AND WOULD HAVE GONE ON MUCH LONGER IF DEAN HAD NOT BROKEN IT UP. FOLLOWING ARE THE HIGHLIGHTS:

(A) DEAN ASKED WHETHER PATHET LAO WOULD SEPARATE POLITICAL FROM MILITARY ASPECTS OF A CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT. SOTH DISCUSSED AT LENGTH THE NEED TO NEGOTIATE A "GLOBAL" AGREEMENT AMONG THE LAO AND THAT THE PATHET LAO DO NOT PT NOT WISH TO DIVORCE THESE TWO ISSUES. WHEN DEAN POINTED OUT THAT DR. KISSINGER HAD TALKED TO THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ABOUT LAOS AND THAT HE GAINED THE IMPRESSION IN HANOI THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE PREFERRED A MILITARY CEASEFIRE FIRST, WITH A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT TO FOLLOW, SOTH STATED IN CLEAR AND UNMISTAKABLE LANGUAGE THAT "REGARDLESS OF WHAT OTHER NATIONS WANT IN LAOS, THE PATRIOTIC FRONT DEMANDS A GLOBAL SETTLEMENT, WHICH INCLUDES BOTH A POLITICAL AND MILITARY SETTLEMENT."

(B) DEAN SAID THAT IT APPEARED TO HIM THAT THE OUTSTANDING DIFFERENCES IN THE DOCUMENT PRESENTLY UNDER NEGOTIATION BETWEEN THE PATHET LAO AND THE RLG ARE SMALL. SOTH DID NOT AGREE AND CITED AS EXAMPLE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES ON THE NAME OF THE RLG. SOTH SAID THAT THE VIENTIANE SIDE MUST SIGN FOR THE "GOVERNMENT OF VIENTIANE" IN ORDER TO REFLECT THE FACT THAT THE PRESENT RLG ONLY CONTROLS A SMALL PORTION OF THE TERRAIN AND THE POPULATION. DEAN POINTED OUT THE FALLACY OF THIS REASONING, BECAUSE CONTROL OVER TERRITORY IS NOT NECESSARILY A VALID CRITERIA FOR CHALLENGING THE LEGALITY OF A GOVERNMENT. FOR EXAMPLE, CERTAIN PORTIONS OF BURMA ARE IN OPEN REVOLT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT IN RANGOON BUT THIS HAS NOT IN ANY WAY LED TO CALLING THAT GOVERNMENT ANYTHING ELSE THAN THE "GOVERNMENT OF THE UNION OF BURMA". THE LENGTHY EXCHANGE ON THIS POINT DID NOT CONVINCE SOTH TO CHANGE THE LPF POSITION ON THAT

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POINT.

(C) THE CONVERSATION THEN TURNED TO THE 50-50 FORMULA FOR A FUTURE COALITION GOVERNMENT. DEAN SAID THAT HE THOUGHT THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD NOT BUDGE FROM HIS POSITION OF KEEPING THE PRIME MINISTER'S SLOT IN ADDITION TO THE OTHER CABINET POSITIONS TO WHICH THE 50-50 FORMULA WOULD BE APPLIED. SOTH SAID THAT ON THIS POINT, THE PATHET LAO WOULD ACCEPT THE PRIME MINISTER BEING IN ADDITION TO THE OTHER CABINET PORTFOLIOS OF WHICH THE PATHET LAO AND THEIR ALLIES WOULD RECEIVE 50 PERCENT. HOWEVER, IN RETURN FOR THIS CONCESSION, WHICH SOTH SAID WOULD GIVE THE "RIGHT" MORE THAN HALF OF THE CABINET SEATS, THE PATHET LAO DEMANDS THAT THE VICE PRIME MINISTER'S POSITION GO TO THE PATHET LAO AND SPECIFICALLY TO PRINCE SOUPHANOUVONG. WHEN DEAN POINTED OUT THAT SUCH A SOLUTION WOULD RUN INTO SEVERE OPPOSITION BY THE RIGHTISTS, SOTH SAID THAT "IT IS UP TO SOUVANNA TO HANDLE THIS HANDFUL OF RIGHTIST "TROUBLE-MAKERS WHO HAVE NO POPULAR SUPPORT." DEAN ARGUED THAT THIS WAS UNREALISTIC, BECAUSE THESE RIGHTIST CRITICS ENJOY CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT IN THE ROYAL ARMY AND HENCE HAVE A REAL POWER BASE WHICH SOUVANNA MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT IN NEGOTIATING WITH THE PATHET LAO.

(D) DEAN THEN POINTED OUT THAT WE HAD INDICATIONS FROM HANOI THAT RATHER THAN NEGOTIATING A GLOBAL AGREEMENT AT THIS STAGE, HANOI FAVORS A STRICTLY MILITARY CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT IMMEDIATELY AND DISCUSSION OF THE REMAINING PROBLEMS, INCLUDING THE POLITICAL ISSUES, WITHIN THIRTY DAYS AFTER THE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT. SOTH SAID THAT THE PATHET LAO ARE WILLING TO "PROCLAIM" IMMEDIATELY A CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT BUT SUCH AN ACCORD, BRINGING TO AN END HOSTILITIES, CAN ONLY BE SIGNED IF THE TWO SIDES HAVE WORKED OUT IN ADVANCE THE TERMS OF A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT. DEAN POINTED OUT THAT THIS MEANS THE PATHET LAO LINK AN IMMEDIATE MILITARY CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT TO AN UNDERSTANDING ON THE SETTLEMENT OF THE POLITICAL QUESTION AND ASKED WHETHER THIS WAS CORRECT. SOTH EMPHATICALLY REITERATED THAT AN IMMEDIATE END TO HOSTILITIES CAN ONLY BE PROCLAIMED IF THERE IS BROAD UNDERSTANDING ON THE POLITICAL SETTLEMENT WHICH IS TO FOLLOW.

(3) SINCE THIS CONVERSATION HAD OCCURRED AS A RESULT OF A CASUAL SOCIAL ENCOUNTER, DID DID NOT CONSIDER HIMSELF QUALIFIED TO CONTINUE THE DISCUSSION FURTHER. AS DEAN WAS TRYING TO GET AWAY, SOTH ASKED HIM WHAT HE THOUGHT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT. DEAN REPLIED THAT THE PATHET LAO SHOULD HELP THE PRIME MINISTER IN BRINGING ABOUT A CEASEFIRE AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE AND THAT THE INTRANSIGENT PATHET LAO POSITION UNDERMINES SOUVANNA'S POSITION. SOTH SAID THE PATHET LAO WOULD NOT MAKE FURTHER CONCESSIONS AND IF NO CEASEFIRE IS NEGOTIATED NOW, THE PATHET LAO COULD FIGHT ON. HE SAID, "WE HAVE FOUGHT FOR TWENTY YEARS AND, IF NEED BE, WILL CONTINUE TO FIGHT TO OBTAIN THE KIND OF SETTLEMENT IN LAOS WHICH WE THINK IS JUST." AT THIS POINT, DEAN BROKE OFF THE CONVERSATION, ALTHOUGH IT WAS APPARENT THAT SOTH WAS IN NO HURRY TO DISCONTINUE THE DIALOGUE.

COMMENT: THIS UNFORESEEN AND UNSOLICITED CONVERSATION WITH THE THIRD RANKING MEMBER OF THE PATHET LAO DELEGATION

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CONFIRMED WHAT SOUVANNA HAD TOLD US EARLIER IN THE DAY THAT THE PATHET LAO CONTINUE TO LINK MILITARY ASPECTS OF A CEASEFIRE TO A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT.

NEW BUT RELATED SUBJECT:

WE UNDERSTAND SOUVANNA PHOUMA GAVE FRENCH ORT (TV) AND CBS (TV) AN INTERVIEW AT 3:30 THIS AFTERNOON. WE HAVE BEEN INFORMED THAT HE DODGED QUESTIONS RE NEGOTIATIONS BUT SAID THAT SOMETHING WOULD HAPPEN BETWEEN NOW AND FEBRUARY 26.

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